Gunston Classics

THE TALE OF JASPER JAY

Arthur Scott Bailey

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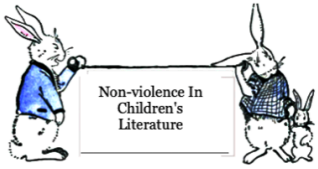
By Arthur Scott Bailey

Illustration By Harry L. Smith



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Jasper, Like Frisky Squirrel, Was Fond of Nuts
Frontispiece

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THE TALE OF JASPER JAY

I
A NOISY ROGUE

Some of the feathered folk in Pleasant Valley said that old Mr. Crow was the noisiest person in the neighborhood. But they must have forgotten all about Mr. Crow's knavish cousin, Jasper Jay. And it was not only in summer, either, that Jasper's shrieks and laughter woke the echoes.

Since it was his habit to spend his winters right there in Farmer Green's young pines, near the foot of Blue Mountain, on many a cold morning Jasper's ear-splitting "Jay! Jay!" rang out on the frosty air.

At that season Jasper often visited the farm buildings, in the hope of finding a few kernels of corn scattered about the door of the corn-crib.

But it seemed to make little difference to him whether he found food there or not. If he caught the cat out of doors he had good sport teasing her. And he always enjoyed that.

Jasper was a bold rowdy--but handsome. And Farmer Green liked to look out of the window early on a bleak morning and see him in his bright blue suit frisking in and out of the bare trees. Still, Farmer Green knew well enough that Jasper Jay was a rogue.

"He reminds me of a bad boy," Johnnie Green's father said one day. "He's mischievous and destructive; and he's forever screeching and whistling.

But there's something about him that I can't help liking.... Maybe it's because he always has such a good time."

"He steals birds' eggs in summer," Johnnie Green remarked.

"I've known boys to do that," his father answered. And Johnnie said nothing more just then. Perhaps he was too busy watching Jasper Jay, who had flown into the orchard and was already breakfasting on frozen apples, which hung here and there upon the trees.

When warm weather came, the rogue Jasper fared better. Then there were insects and fruit for him. And though Jasper took his full share of Farmer Green's strawberries, currants and blackberries, he did him no

small service by devouring moths that would have harmed the grapes.

But in the fall Jasper scorned almost any food except nuts, which he liked more than anything else--that is, if their shells were not too thick. Beechnuts and chestnuts and acorns suited him well. And he was very skillful in opening them. He would grasp a nut firmly with his feet and split it with his strong bill. Johnnie Green could not crack a butternut with his father's hammer more quickly than Jasper could reach
the inside of a sweet beechnut.

Though Jasper hated to spend any of his time during the nutting season by doing much else except _eat_, he was so fond of nuts that he always hid away as many as he could in cracks and crevices, and buried them under the fallen leaves.

You see, he was like Frisky Squirrel in that. He believed in storing nuts for the winter. But since he had no hollow tree in which to put them, it was only natural that he never succeeded in finding every one of his carefully hidden nuts. He left them in so many different places that he couldn't remember them all. Those that he lost in that

fashion often took root and grew into trees. And so Jasper Jay helped Farmer Green in more ways than one.

But no doubt Jasper would have shrieked with laughter had anybody suggested such an idea to him.

II
A BLOW FOR THE BULLY

Jasper Jay had some queer notions in his head. One of them was that a person couldn't be happy unless he was making a great deal of noise. And if there was anything that roused Jasper's wrath, it was the sight of some quiet, modest little neighbor who minded his own affairs and had
little to say.

There was one such chap who made his home in a wild grapevine that grew upon the stone wall in front of the farmhouse. His name was Mr. Chippy;
and he was never known to do anybody the least bit of harm. On the contrary, he was quite helpful to Farmer Green's wife, for he went to the farmhouse almost every day and cleared the crumbs off the kitchen doorstep.

But Jasper Jay complained that Mr. Chippy was altogether too humble.

"He never says anything except '_Chip, chip, chip, chip_,'" Jasper often remarked. "And his voice is so high and thin that anybody would think he was a little old lady, to hear him. He's too quiet to get on in the world. And as for a good time, I don't believe he ever had one in all his life."

Jasper said a good many other unpleasant things about mild Mr. Chippy.

And one day when the saucy rascal had nothing better to do he flew over to the stone wall just to talk to Mr. Chippy and tell him what he thought of him.

"Hi there, red-head!" Jasper Jay shouted. "Come out here on the wall! I want to see you."

Mr. Chippy thrust his chestnut crowned head through the leaves of the wild grapevine. And one could hardly say that he looked pleased. Like most people, he was not overjoyed by Jasper Jay's visits. But he crept on top of the stone wall and, chipped, a how-dy-do to his caller.

"That's no way to greet anybody!" cried Jasper Jay, rudely. "If you want to make a person feel that he is welcome you ought to speak up good and loud--and slap him on the back. And you must look happy, too."

Little Mr. Chippy smiled faintly. But Jasper Jay was not satisfied.

"You don't look happy!" he scoffed. "You appear as if you had a pain somewhere.... Come, now! Let me hear you give a hearty laugh!"

If Mr. Chippy had known that his caller was going to be so rude he would have stayed hidden in the wild grapevine. And now he wished that Jasper would go away and leave him in peace. As for laughing, he saw nothing at all to laugh at.

"You'd better do as I tell you!" Jasper Jay warned him. And he raised his crest and stamped angrily upon the stone wall. "You're altogether too, quiet. I want you to laugh. . .loud.

"You're going to be happy, if I have to break every bone in your body," Jasper added.

Naturally, that threat did not help little Mr. Chippy to laugh. Instead, he looked quite worried. He knew that Jasper Jay was a bully. And there was no telling what he might do to anyone so small as Mr. Chippy was. So he tried his best to please Jasper. But he was so upset that he could manage only a feeble, "Chip, chip, chip, chip!"

"That'll never do," Jasper told him.

"Maybe this will, then," said Mr. Chippy, quietly. And darting at Jasper Jay, he knocked him off the stone wall before Jasper knew what was happening. Jasper Jay was furious. He scrambled quickly back upon the wall. But Mr. Chippy had vanished. He had dived under the cover of the grapevine and hid in a chink between the stones, where Jasper could not find him.

"I declare," said Jasper Jay at last," I declare, he's got away from me!" And so Jasper went off, shaking his head. He had never supposed that mild Mr. Chippy would dare do anything so bold as to knock anybody off a stone wall.

It is plain that Jasper Jay had never learned that one can be brave without boasting. And as he flew off across the road toward the river, Jasper thought he heard a peculiar noise from the depths of the wild grapevine.

It was only Mr. Chippy, chuckling to himself. For Jasper had made him quite happy, after all--though not exactly in the way that the blue-coated bully had intended.

III
THE STRANGE CRY

As you may already know, Jasper Jay was a vain fellow. And it was not only of his brilliant blue suit that he was proud. He was greatly pleased with his own voice, though many of the feathered folk thought it harsh and disagreeable. But, that, perhaps, was because they seldom or never heard Jasper's sweeter, flute-like notes, or the soft, low chatter which he kept for his most intimate friends.

What most of his acquaintances knew and disliked was Jasper's noisy

"Jay! Jay!" But even that discordant cry suited Jasper very well. And he often boasted that there wasn't another bird in Pleasant Valley that could make a greater racket than he.

To be sure, there was Jasper's cousin, old Mr. Crow. His "Caw, caw," could be heard half a mile away, if

the wind was right. But Jasper Jay always insisted that his own voice was much stronger than Mr. Crow's.

And nobody troubled himself to dispute Jasper's claim.

So Jasper Jay had little to worry about until at last something happened that made him feel quite uneasy. It was almost noon on a hot summer's day; and Jasper was resting amid the shade of a big beech tree on the edge of the woods, where he could look across the meadow and watch Farmer Green and his boy Johnnie and the hired-man at work in the hayfield. Jasper was just thinking how much pleasanter was his own carefree life than theirs when a long, loud call blared across the meadow. He had never heard that cry before; and he raised himself on tiptoe, listening intently as the sound echoed back and forth across the valley.

Though Jasper stayed quite still for some time, waiting to hear the cry again, it was not repeated.

"I'd like to know what sort of bird that was!" he said to himself at last. "If he stays in this neighborhood I'll have to drive him away, for his voice is certainly louder than mine. And I wouldn't let him come here and insult me like that."

All the afternoon Jasper Jay flew up and down the length of Pleasant Valley and back and forth across it, hunting for the strange bird with the loud voice. But he met no newcomer at all.

Jasper had almost decided that the stranger had merely been passing through the valley. He certainly hoped that such was the case, because he had no way of telling how big the unknown might be. If he were as large as his voice, driving him away might prove no joke for Jasper.

By nightfall Jasper began to feel less anxious. To be sure, he dreamed that he met an enormous bird on the top of Blue Mountain, who chased him all the way around the world. And when he awoke just before daybreak he was still frightened, until he remembered that it was only a dream.

"It must have been that fuzzy caterpillar that I ate just before I went to bed," he thought.

Jasper was himself again all the morning. He had a good deal of fun teasing a kitten which had lost itself behind Farmer Green's barn. And he drove Jolly Robin's wife almost frantic by hiding in the orchard and whistling like a hawk. And then, at midday, his fun was spoiled. That

strange scream smote his ears once more. And Jasper trembled both with rage and fear.

He knew then that the stranger was still in the valley.

IV
JASPER'S BOAST

JASPER JAY had said nothing to anyone concerning the horrid call, which had sounded twice--each time at midday. But now that he felt sure the strange bird whose cry he had heard must have come to live in Pleasant Valley, he could no longer keep from mentioning the matter.

Chancing to meet his cousin, Mr. Crow, the next morning, Jasper stopped to talk with the old gentleman. You see, Mr. Crow was widely known as a gossip. He usually knew what was going on in the neighborhood. So Jasper thought it likely that Mr. Crow could tell him all about the unwelcome stranger. "Perhaps," he thought, "the old scamp has already seen him."

Of course, Jasper never termed his cousin a scamp to his face. He always spoke to him very politely, greeting him as

"Mr. Crow," in spite of their close relationship. And there was a reason why Jasper did that.

Mr. Crow had once given him a severe beating because Jasper had called him something else. And Jasper Jay never forgot it.

Now Jasper first inquired after his cousin's health. He did that to put old Mr. Crow in a good humor. But Jasper was sorry at once that he had started Mr. Crow to talking about his ills. It happened that the old gentleman was then suffering from gout, hay-fever and housemaid's knee.

And he liked to talk about his ailments. Living all alone as he did, he had nobody to do his housework. And that, he complained, was the reason why his knee troubled him.

Jasper Jay fidgeted about while Mr. Crow was telling him all that—and much more--concerning his troubles. Jasper really did not care to hear about them.

"Yes! yes!" he exclaimed impatiently, for it seemed to him that old Mr. Crow never would stop talking about himself. "Now that we're having a good spell of weather you ought to begin to feel better. And what's the news, Mr. Crow? Have you heard of anything happening around here lately?"

The old gentleman shook his head.

"Things are quiet," he said.

"Nobody left Pleasant Valley recently?" Jasper inquired.

"Not that I've heard of," replied Mr. Crow.

"No strangers come here to live?" Jasper asked him.

"No one at all!" said Mr. Crow.

"That's queer!" Jasper exclaimed. "I was sure I heard a new voice yesterday. And I heard it again to-day, too--at exactly the same time."

"What did it sound like?" Mr. Crow wanted to know. So Jasper gave an imitation of the odd cry that had swept the valley.

"It was quite loud and very unpleasant to hear," he remarked. "And whoever the stranger may be, if he's going to disturb me every noon like that when I'm having my midday rest I shall have to drive him out of the neighborhood."

"It's almost noon now," said old Mr. Crow, cocking his eye at the sun.

"Perhaps we'll hear the cry soon."

The words were scarcely out of his bill when a far-reaching call caught the attention of the two cousins. It

brought Jasper Jay to his tiptoes at once. And he craned his neck in an effort to catch a glimpse of the stranger who possessed such a powerful voice.

"There it is!" Jasper cried. "There's the call again! Do you know what kind of bird makes that cry?"

Something seemed to have stuck in Mr. Crow's throat. At le spluttered and choked and coughed. And he was quite unable to answer just then. But after the mountains had quit tossing the sound back and forth and all was quiet again he said:

"No small bird could make a sound like that. And if you can drive him out of Pleasant Valley you're a better fighter than I ever supposed."

Mr. Crow might have known that his remark would not please Jasper Jay.

Jasper gave his cousin an angry glance; and he looked as if he would have liked to fight him. But he had suffered one beating by his elderly cousin. And he didn't care for another. So he only sneered openly. And then he screamed in a loud voice:

"I'll find that noisy fellow and drive him out of Pleasant Valley, if it takes me all summer to do it!" And he

raised his crest, and snapped his beak together, and stamped his feet, so that he looked very fierce indeed.

But old Mr. Crow was not frightened in the least. He only smiled.

"Let me know when you've driven the stranger away," he said.

"Oh! you'll hear about it," Jasper Jay assured him. "It will be the most famous fight that will ever take place in this valley," he boasted. And then the two cousins parted. It did not put Jasper Jay in any better humor to hear Mr. Crow's hoarse _haw-haw_ echoing across the valley. Of course, Jasper did not know what he was laughing at. But that only served to make the blue-coated scamp all the more peevish.

V
THE SEARCH

AFTER telling Mr. Crow what he was going to do to the strange bird, which he had never seen, but only heard, Jasper Jay renewed his search for the unknown.

There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that the stranger could out-scream him. And he knew he could never be happy so long as such a loud-voiced rival remained in the neighborhood.

Jasper hoped, at least, that the newcomer was not too large.

"He can't be very big, or I'd have found him before this," he reassured himself.

Though he hunted far and wide, looking in hollow trees and in the tops of the tallest timber, as well as inside the densest thickets, Jasper could still find no trace of his enemy--for so he regarded the unknown bird.

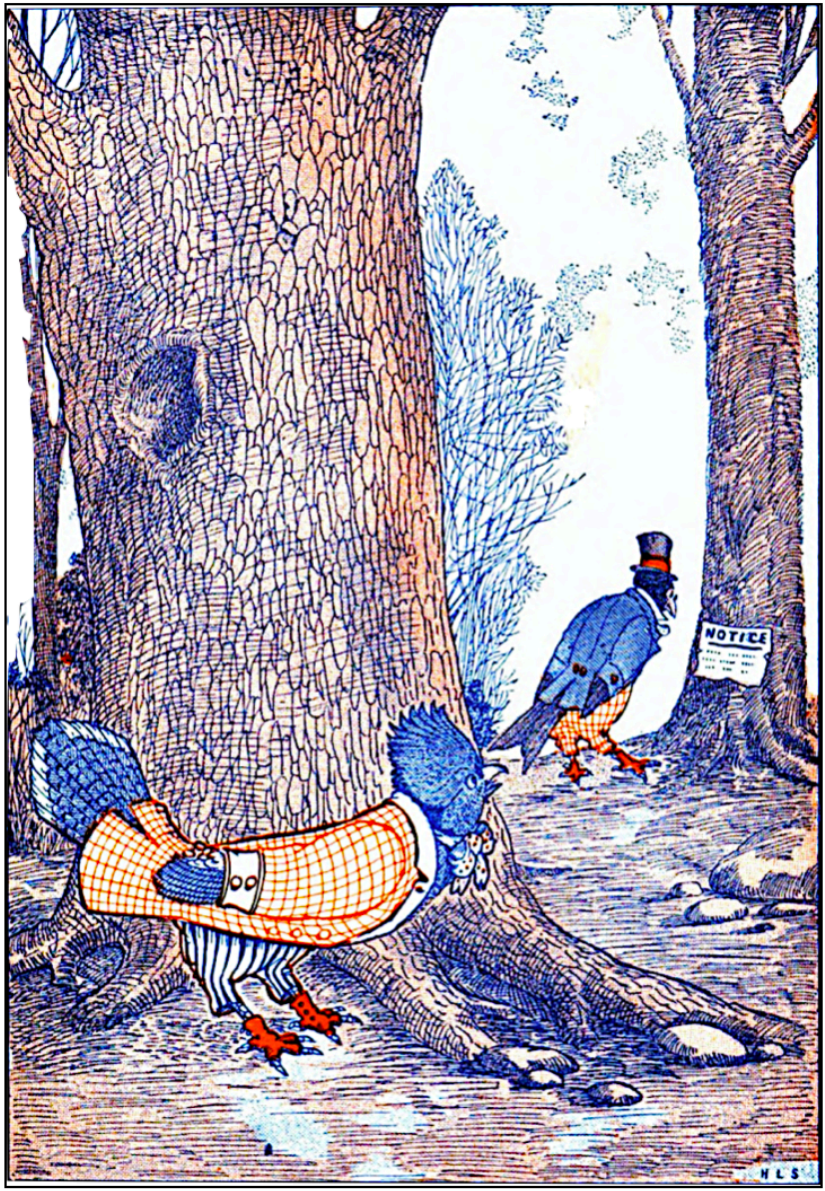
For several days he continued his unsuccessful search. And though that same strange cry enraged him each noon, he was quite at a loss to know where to look for its author. He asked a good many of the feathered folk if they had seen a stranger anywhere. But not one of them admitted that he had.... Jasper Jay thought it very odd.

Meanwhile, he took special pains to dodge his cousin, old Mr. Crow, whenever he caught sight of him; for he remembered Mr. Crow's disagreeable remark. But the day finally came when Jasper met him face to face in the woods. And Mr. Crow called to him loudly to wait a moment.

"I want to ask you," said the old gentleman, "whether you've found and driven away that stranger yet?" The old rogue's voice cracked as he spoke and he rocked back and forth as if he were much amused by something.

"I haven't set eyes on him yet," Jasper replied somewhat coldly. "But I've heard him every noon. And I expect to find him pretty soon."

"Have you looked for him around the farmhouse?" Mr. Crow inquired.



Jasper took care to dodge Mr. Crow.

"Why, no!" said Jasper. "I hadn't thought of his being there."

"Then," said old Mr. Crow, "I'd go over there at once, if I were you. And I'd stay right there until noon. You won't have to wait more than three or four hours. And unless I'm much mistaken you'll find your search at an end...."

"I hope," he added, "I hope you won't get hurt when you stranger."

Now, it struck Jasper Jay that old Mr. Crow knew more about the strange bird with the loud voice than he was willing to tell. Anyhow, Mr. Crow looked very wise. And he croaked and smiled in a way that was most annoying. What he said about Jasper's not getting hurt made Jasper feel
quite uneasy, too.

"Won't you come with me?" he asked Mr. Crow very politely. To tell the truth, Jasper was worried. Now that he was about to meet the strange bird he began to be frightened. He did not like the thought of facing him alone.

"I can't come now," said Mr. Crow, "because I'm going to be busy. But I'll join you on the barnyard fence a

little before midday. Maybe I'll bring a friend or two along with me."

"Good!" cried Jasper Jay. "That will be fine."

So they said good-by. And Mr. Crow hurried off into the woods, for—as he said--he was going to be busy.

VI
A JOKE ON JASPER JAY

WITH a loud squall of glee, Jasper Jay made off in the direction of the farm buildings. Now that he was going to have company, later, he felt much better. And he resolved to keep well hidden in the top of the great oak near Farmer Green's house, until the time came for Mr. Crow to arrive, and his friends, too, if he brought them.

Jasper waited in the big oak for a long time. He saw no strange bird.

And he was glad--because he did not want to meet him until Mr. Crow came.

For once in his life Jasper kept quite still. He could see a kitten playing in the dooryard; and he would have liked to tease it. And there were the hens, too. Jasper smiled as he thought of the way they would scurry for shelter if he should cry out like a hawk. But he made no

noise, for he was afraid the strange bird might be lurking about
somewhere, ready to pounce upon him before Jasper knew what was happening.

At last Jasper left his hiding place and flew beyond the barn, where he alighted on the fence, to meet Mr. Crow. And very promptly the old gentleman arrived. He brought ten of his relations with him, too, all noisy and unmannerly fellows. They were not the least bit timid, because they knew that Farmer Green and his son Johnnie and the hired-man were working in the hayfield, beyond the pasture.

"Here we are!" cried Mr. Crow. "We've come to see you whip the person with the loud voice and drive him out of the valley." And all ten of his relations joined Mr. Crow in a loud, cackling laugh.

"What's the joke?" asked Jasper Jay.

"Oh, there's no joke at all--yet," said Mr. Crow. And he and his companions all laughed again. "Come around to the other side of the barn," Mr. Crow continued. "It's time for the stranger to screech, for it'll be noon before you know it."

So they all moved to another part of the fence, from which they could see the farmhouse. And no sooner

had they settled themselves comfortably than Farmer Green's wife came to the doorway and held a horn to her lips.

Then came the loud blast that Jasper knew so well. He was so startled that he almost fell off the fence. But he was not frightened.

He was very angry, however. For Mr. Crow and his friends began to jeer at him.

"Fly at her!" cried Mr. Crow. "She's the bird that you're going to drive out of Pleasant Valley. And we all want to see you do it."

It was very uncomfortable for Jasper Jay. He had mistaken the sound of the dinner-horn for the call of a strange bird. And he felt uncommonly foolish.

Since he dared not attack Mr. Crow, especially when his ten relations were with him, there was nothing Jasper could do except give a loud, helpless scream of rage and hurry away toward the woods.

"See those crows chasing that blue jay!" Farmer Green said to Johnnie, as they walked toward home. "Probably he's played some trick on them."

But for once it was not Jasper who was guilty. It was old Mr. Crow himself who had played the trick. He had

known from the first that Mrs. Green had bought a new dinner-horn, because the men were always late for dinner. Though how he discovered that fact is a mystery.

Somehow, old Mr. Crow knew about everything that happened in Pleasant Valley. And now Jasper Jay had learned something more, too.

VII
SCARING THE HENS

There was one sport of which Jasper Jay was over-fond. He loved to imitate the calls of other birds; and Jasper was such a good mimic that he often deceived his neighbors by his tricks.

It was not pleasant for a sober, elderly bird-gentleman to come home at night from a hard day's work and have his wife accuse him of idling away his time.

"You can't deny it--for I could hear you laughing in the woods!" she might say.

And it was not always an easy task to convince her that what she had heard was nobody but that noisy rascal, Jasper Jay, playing a trick on her.

Nor did Jasper limit his droll teasing to his own neighbors. Sometimes he hid in a tree near the farm buildings and frightened the hens by making a sound exactly like a certain red-shouldered hawk, who lived in the

low woods along Black Creek, where frogs were plentiful. A fierce scream of "Kee-you! kee-you!" was quite enough to alarm an old hen with a big family of young chickens. Though she might know well enough that the red-shouldered hawk seldom made a meal of poultry, preferring frogs and field-mice above all other food, it was only natural that she shouldn't care to take any chances. The haste with which a nervous mother-hen called her family into the chicken house when she heard that
cry of "Kee-you! kee-you!" always amused Jasper Jay, for he never tired of the game.

Surprising as it may seem, now and then Jasper's hawk-call deceived even Farmer Green himself. And sometimes he would step into the kitchen and take his old gun off the hooks on the wall above the wide fireplace and hurry outside again in the hope of getting a shot at Mr. Hawk. It happened at last that in some way Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk heard of this trick of Jasper's. And that old gossip, Mr. Crow, warned Jasper Jay that he had better be careful.

"Mr. Hawk says that you are giving him a bad name with Farmer Green,"

Mr. Crow told Jasper one day. "Farmer Green calls him 'that old hen-hawk,' and, of course, it's not very pleasant for Mr. Hawk to have somebody looking for him with a gun. I know what the feeling is like, myself," said old Mr. Crow. "Believe me, it's enough to make one most uncomfortable!"

But Jasper Jay only shrieked with laughter.

"You'll sing a different song if Mr. Hawk catches you," Mr. Crow snapped. And that made Jasper Jay scream all the louder. Then he stopped laughing and said "Caw! caw!" in a husky voice so like Mr. Crow's own that the old gentleman spluttered and fumed and all but chased Jasper out of the woods where they were sitting at the time.

They never did get along well together--old Mr. Crow and Jasper Jay. They were cousins, you know. But that fact did not help matters at all. Perhaps they knew too much about each other.

"Don't worry about me!" said Jasper Jay at last.

"Very well!" Mr. Crow replied stiffly. "But remember--I've warned you!" he croaked. And then he flew away to his nest in a tall elm, overlooking the cornfield.

VIII
A BIT OF MISCHIEF

JASPER JAY did not heed Mr. Crow's warning. When he learned that Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk was angry with him because he had imitated Mr. Hawk's fierce cry, "Kee-you! kee-you!" Jasper was more pleased with himself than ever. Scaring Farmer Green's hens with that piercing scream had been a good deal of fun. But making Mr. Hawk angry was still more.

So Jasper Jay began to visit the farmyard even oftener than before. If the mother hens, with their chicks, did not happen to be scratching in the barnyard, there was always sport of some sort to be had.

One day when Jasper was on his way to Farmer Green's place, he happened to meet a blue jay friend of his known as Noisy Jake, because he was not very quiet. In

fact, one could almost always hear his voice ringing through the woods.

"You seem to be in a hurry," Noisy Jake bawled. "Where are you going?"

"S-sh!" said Jasper. "I'm going to the farmyard to have some fun scaring the hens. But I don't want everybody to know it. Do you want to come along?"

Noisy Jake promptly said he did. So the two rascals hurried across the pasture and over the meadow toward the farm buildings.

"Now," said Jasper Jay, when they had reached the farmyard, "now I'll hide in this oak here and you can hide in that one there." He pointed to a tree a little further from the chicken house than the one where he intended to perch. Naturally, it was not like Jasper Jay to give the best seat to anybody else.

"What'll we do then?" Noisy Jake asked.

"You see those hens," said Jasper. "I'm going to scream like Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk. And you'll laugh when the hens hurry their chicks out of the way.... If you want to, you may scream too--but not till after I have."

Noisy Jake agreed to Jasper's plan. And he quickly disappeared among the branches of the oak to which Jasper had sent him.

Then Jasper just had to stop and laugh to himself over the fright he was going to give the old hens. He was about to open his mouth to imitate the cry of Mr. Hawk when something happened that made him terrible angry.

"Kee-you! kee-you!" The fierce scream rang out over the farmyard. And immediately the mother-hens called to their children, with frantic clucks, to run for their lives into the chicken house.

Jasper Jay did not laugh at all over the way the chicks scurried out of sight.

"Noisy Jake has played a mean trick on me!" he said to himself. "He went and screamed before it was his turn!"

Since he didn't want to miss _all_ the fun, Jasper let out a blood-curdling "Kee-you! kee-you!" himself, just to hurry the last hen under cover. But, somehow, he had to confess to himself--though he wouldn't have admitted it to anybody else--he had to confess that Noisy Jake's cry sounded far more like Mr. Hawk's than did his own.

Of course, that did not make Jasper feel any pleasanter. He wished he had not told Noisy Jake where he was going.

"I'll punish him for his meddling!" Jasper exclaimed. And he flew straight for the tree where Noisy Jake had hidden.

But Jasper did not reach the tree.

"Kee-you! kee-you!" The cry came from above his head. And looking up, Jasper Jay saw Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk himself, dropping down like lightning out of the sky.

Mr. Hawk paid not the slightest attention to the frightened hens and their chicks. He seemed to have eyes only for Jasper Jay. And on his proud, cruel face there was a look of anger that made Jasper wish he had never, never imitated Mr. Hawk's cry.

He was sorry now, that he had not heeded Mr. Crow's warning. But his cousin, old Mr. Crow, was always looking solemn and croaking loudly about "trouble." It was no wonder that people paid little attention to what he said.

IX
JASPER HAS TO HIDE

WHEN Jasper Jay looked up and saw Mr. Redshouldered Hawk darting down upon him from above, he dodged to one side and screamed loudly for help.

His friend Noisy Jake was known as a great fighter. And Jasper hoped that together they might be able to drive Mr. Hawk away.

But he was disappointed. Noisy Jake did not appear. And there was a good reason why he did not. At that very moment he was flying off across the meadow as fast as his beautiful wings could carry him. He had seen Mr. Hawk circling above the barnyard. And he had lost no time in making his escape.

But Jasper Jay knew nothing of all that. And when he found that there was no one to help him he was just as

frightened as the hens had been. He knew that he was no match for Mr. Hawk. And he had no wish to make a meal for him. Jasper was quite willing to leave that pleasure to the frogs that splashed their time away along the banks of Black Creek.

For a few moments Jasper ducked first one way and then another. He had several narrow escapes. And there's no telling what might have happened if he hadn't suddenly decided that he would follow the hens' example.

So without even stopping to knock on the door he dashed into the chicken house and alighted on a roost in the darkest corner he could find.

For two excellent reasons Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk did not follow him. First, he had always made it a rule never to go inside one of Farmer Green's buildings. And second, he happened to catch a glimpse of Farmer Green running into the house through the kitchen door.

Mr. Hawk knew what that meant. Farmer Green was going for his gun! And so he winged his way swiftly toward Black Creek, hoping, as he went, that he had taught Jasper Jay a lesson.

Meanwhile, there was a great uproar in the chicken house. But Farmer Green paid no attention to that--

supposing, of course, that it was merely because of the fright the hawk had given the hens.

For once there was more noise than even Jasper Jay liked. It appeared that there was a bold young rooster in the chicken house. And he objected to Jasper Jay's presence.

"What do you mean by coming in here where you're not wanted?" he screamed. "Where are your manners?"

Actually, Jasper Jay wondered what the rooster was talking about. Never having had any manners, Jasper didn't know the meaning of the word. And since he could not answer, he said nothing.

"Stick your spurs into him and maybe he'll speak!" screeched a pert young hen.

Jasper looked at the rooster then; and he saw that the brazen fellow wore long, sharp spurs upon his legs. They looked almost as wicked as Mr. Hawk's cruel talons.

"Please," said Jasper, "I've come in to get out of the way of Mr. Hawk."

"Ha!" cried the rooster. "Unless I'm mistaken you're the rogue that's always frightening the ladies by screaming like Mr. Hawk. So I don't see why you should object to his society."

"I was only fooling," Jasper Jay whined. "I meant no harm, you know. Let me stay here a while and I promise you I won't bother the hens again."

"I accept your apology, as well as your promise," the rooster replied with great dignity. And then he began crowing in a manner that was most annoying to Jasper Jay. It was the same as saying, "This rascal's afraid of me!"

That was true, too. And that was what made the crowing sound so unpleasant in Jasper's ears.

He left as soon as he dared show himself out of doors. And he sometimes remarked afterward that a chicken house wouldn't be a bad place to live in, after all, if it weren't for the roosters.

"They boast too much," said Jasper Jay. "Nothing could induce me to listen to their silly crowing. And to tell the truth, I don't see how the hens manage to stand it."

X
THE NUTTING PARTY

FOR a long time Jasper Jay had been waiting for something. It was fall; and he impatiently watched the tree-tops on the side of Blue Mountain change from their quiet summer green to hues of flaming gold and red.

Though they were beautiful, to tell the truth Jasper did not in the least care what color a tree was. So long as it bore nuts, he was satisfied. And to him the turning leaves meant only that the autumn was lengthening--and the nuts were growing ripe.

That was what Jasper Jay was waiting for. And as soon as the frosts came and burst open the prickly pods that covered the beechnuts he intended to lead the first nutting party of the season to the place where the beeches grew.

Now, going a-nutting with a crowd is much more fun than gathering nuts alone. And Jasper usually preferred a nutting party of a dozen blue jays. Then he always had twelve times as much fun as he could have just by himself, because there was twelve times the noise.

So on the very first day that the nuts were ready to be eaten Jasper Jay asked eleven friends to join him. As it happened, Jasper found a company of twelve waiting for him at the appointed time on the edge of the woods. Somehow, Noisy Jake (whom Jasper hadn't invited) had heard of the party. And he invited himself. Jasper was not at all pleased when he found that Noisy Jake intended to go a-nutting too. He had not yet forgiven that boisterous rowdy for not having warned him, when Mr. Red-shouldered Hawk was sailing about over Farmer Green's barnyard, and Jasper had to seek safety in the chicken house.

Jasper gave Jake a cool nod and turned his back on him. But it would have taken a great deal more than that to hurt Noisy Jake's feelings. Indeed, he was so impudent that he immediately imitated Mr. Hawk's cry, "Kee-you! kee-you!"

It gave Jasper a great start to hear that screech behind his back. He jumped into the air and alighted with his face toward Noisy Jake, having turned around while his feet were off the ground.

Jake was laughing loudly at his own joke, while all the rest ,exceptJasper, squalled with delight.

Jasper Jay thought for a moment that he would have to fight Jake on the spot. But he was in such a hurry to get to the place where the beeches grew that he decided to pay no more attention to the rude fellow.

"Come on!" Jasper cried. "Follow me!" And he made for the beech grove at top speed, with the nutting party following close behind him.

There was a great squawking and screaming and whistling as the nutting party flew into the tops of the beech trees and the nuts began rattling down upon the ground.

But their fun did not last long. Another nutting party, led by Johnnie Green, arrived at the grove soon after them; and, of course, that put an end to their sport. They knew that boys not only whistled but threw stones as well.

It was most disappointing. And Jasper and his friends were feeling quite peevish when Noisy Jake suddenly cried:

"Let's go over to the oak woods! There are plenty of acorns there; and we can have lots of fun!"

All the crowd--except Jasper Jay--shouted something that sounded like "Hurrah!" And before Jasper knew what was happening everybody had started for the oak woods. This time it was Noisy Jake that led the nutting party. And all Jasper could do was to follow with the others.

He was no longer the leader. And he was very, very angry. It had been his party, in the first place. And there was Noisy Jake, whom he had not even invited to it, acting as if he were the one who should say what should--or shouldn't--be done.

Jasper could see Jake talking with some of the others. And he couldn't help feeling that they were talking about _him_. Jake laughed loudly now and then; and although he was flying fast, he looked around occasionally, to make sure that the party was following him. Seeing that Jasper was the last of the procession, Jake shouted to him that he had better hurry, if he didn't want to be left behind. And that made Jasper Jay more indignant than ever.

XI
A STROKE OF LUCK

JASPER'S fun would have been spoiled if he hadn't had a stroke of good fortune. Since he was no longer leading the nutting party he wanted to prevent his friends from following Noisy Jake to the place where the oak trees grew, to have an acorn hunt.

It was no more than anybody could expect that Jasper should feel sulky.

It had been his party in the first place. So, of course, he didn't enjoy seeing somebody else take the lead away from him. Most unhappy he was, as he hurried along the mountain-side, when he happened, all at once, to catch sight of a huge, grayish-brown figure, half hidden among some hemlock boughs. Jasper Jay knew right away that it was Mr. Solomon Owl.

"Stop! stop!" Jasper cried to his friends. "Wait a bit! Here's some fun!"

So the nutting party checked their flight and returned, while Jasper pointed out Solomon Owl's motionless form to them.

They forgot all about the acorn hunt, for the time being, because there was nothing they liked better than teasing Solomon Owl--when there were enough of them. In case any of the blue-coated rascals met Mr. Owl alone, he was most polite to him, for Solomon was not only big and strong but he had sharp talons and a hooked beak.

Those thirteen blue jays, however, knew that they had little to fear from the solemn old chap, so long as they kept out of reach of his claws.

They began jeering at Solomon Owl. And some of them even tried to mock his queer cry, "_Whoo-whoo-too-whoo-too-o-o!_" The woods echoed with their hoots. And Noisy Jake shouted:

"This is luck! Aren't you all glad I found him?"

Now, of course, Jake had not found Solomon Owl. If it hadn't been for Jasper Jay no one would have known he was there. And Jasper was just about to remind Jake of his mistake when he happened to think of something that made him change his mind. It occurred to Jasper that

if Noisy Jake wanted to think he was still the leader of the party perhaps it was just as well to let him. Jake always talked so much, in such aloud tone, that Solomon Owl would be sure to know him.

And Jasper thought he could have plenty of fun himself, teasing Solomon and not saying a word. Then--so Jasper believed--then Solomon Owl wouldn't know that Jasper was in the party at all.

You see, Johnnie Green was not the only person who held that Solomon Owl couldn't see in the daytime. Everybody knew that his big, round eyes were keen enough in the dark. But in the daylight he usually sat quite still in a tree and stared as if he saw nothing at all.

Well, that was just what Solomon Owl was doing then. He said never a word. And he scarcely moved, except to turn his head helplessly now and then, and blink, while his tormentors flew as close to him as they dared and hooted loudly at him.

Jasper and his friends made enough noise to scare even a bigger bird than Solomon Owl. And they said a good many rude things to him, too.

"How are Farmer Green's chickens this fall?" Noisy Jake asked him in a loud voice, while Jasper Jay quietly amused himself by dropping hemlock seeds upon Solomon's head.

Still Solomon Owl made no remarks at all. But he was thinking deeply.

And though some people claimed that he was not nearly so wise as he looked, there were some things that he knew just as well as anyone else.

But Jasper Jay was not aware of that.

XII
SOLOMON OWL'S EYES

AFTER a while Jasper Jay saw that his friends were growing tired of teasing Solomon Owl. So he said to them suddenly, in what was for him a low voice, "Let's go hunt acorns now!" And he flew off with a pleased grin upon his face, for he hoped that he had made trouble for Noisy Jake. His friends all followed him, too, while Noisy Jake hurried on behind them, trying to overtake and pass Jasper Jay.

But he never headed Jasper all the way to the oak woods. And Jasper had a good time there, making all the noise he pleased and eating so many acorns that he made himself almost ill.... If that isn't having a good time, then somebody must be mistaken.

Now, it was quite natural for Jasper Jay to think that he had nothing to fear from Solomon Owl. To be sure, he had flown back and forth in front of Solomon's round,

staring eyes; and he had dropped hemlock seeds upon Solomon's head. But he felt quite safe, because he was sure, Solomon Owl couldn't see him in the daylight. Furthermore, he had said hardly a word, so Solomon shouldn't know, from his voice, that Jasper was teasing him.

When he met Solomon, therefore, right after sunset that same day, as Jasper was hurrying home from the oak woods to get his night's sleep and Solomon Owl was just starting out on his nightly wanderings, Jasper spoke boldly to the big, bulky fellow.

"Good-evening, Mr. Owl!" said he. "I hope you're well, and that you had a good rest to-day."

Solomon Owl turned his head in Jasper's direction and stared at him for a moment. And then he hooted long and loud.

"I'm glad to know it," said Jasper--though he had no idea what Solomon Owl was saying.

In spite of himself, Jasper began to feel a bit uneasy. There was something terrifying in Solomon's odd cry, especially when the dark was falling fast and Jasper Jay was still some distance from home.

Jasper Dropped Hemlock Seeds Upon Solomon's Head"

"Wait a moment, young fellow!" said Solomon Owl in a deep, hollow voice.

I've something to say to you. Weren't you roaming through the woods with a crowd of rowdies this afternoon?"

Jasper Jay couldn't deny it. But he didn't want to admit it, either. So he said:

"I believe Noisy Jake led a nutting party this way."

"Ha!" exclaimed Solomon Owl. "They didn't pick any hemlock seeds, I suppose?"

"I'll ask them," Jasper Jay murmured. "And I'll let you know to-morrow."

He turned away, because he didn't care to talk any longer. His voice was too faint. And his legs felt strangely weak. For Jasper Jay was thoroughly frightened.

"Don't be in a hurry!" Solomon Owl's queer voice boomed. "Some people think I can't see in the daytime. But they're very much mistaken. And nobody ever dropped hemlock seeds on my head yet without my knowing it."

Jasper Jay did not wait to hear anything more. He sprang into the air and tore off through the forest, just before Solomon Owl jumped.

For a heavy gentleman who was big around the waist, Solomon Owl was surprisingly quick. But Jasper Jay was even quicker. And it was lucky for him that he left when he did, for Solomon felt very, very hungry. He had had nothing to eat since dawn.

But he made his rush in vain. Missing Jasper Jay by a few inches, he crashed head foremost into a tree before he could stop. And the pain in the top of his head made him hoot at the top of his voice. Perhaps he was angry, too.

Anyhow, to Jasper Jay the horrid cry sounded as if it were just behind him. He never knew before that he could fly so fast. And some of his friends, who saw a blue streak in the twilight, did not even recognize him.

For several days afterward, Noisy Jake, whom Jasper passed in his headlong flight, talked about the blue lightning he had seen when he was going home from the nutting party. And since nobody could prove that he was mistaken, no one was so foolish as to dispute him.

And that was the way that Jasper Jay learned something about Solomon Owl's eyes, and something about manners, too.

XIII
TEASING A SINGER

THOUGH there were many feathered folk in Pleasant Valley, Jasper Jay did not care to have much to do with any except his own family. Unless he had other business that was more urgent he was always ready to join a troop of noisy blue jays bent on some mischief. But if there were none of his own kind about, Jasper usually preferred to be alone.

Strangely enough, Jasper did not even like to hear other birds singing.

He claimed that their voices were altogether too sweet.

"It's sickening to hear their songs," he used to say.

"Somebody ought to put a stop to these concerts that we have to listen to all summer long." And he was always telling people that what he liked was a good, loud,

jarring call, that you could hear without any trouble. “These soft, musical notes are all nonsense!" he declared.

Jasper held it to be his duty, whenever he chanced to come across one of those forest concerts, to seat himself in a nearby tree and make as much noise as he could, in order to interrupt the singing.

Of course, such actions on the part of Jasper Jay did not make the songsters of Pleasant Valley like him any better. But Jasper never minded that.

"I shall keep right on interrupting these singing societies," he said, "until I've put an end to such nuisances." Naturally, that was only his way of looking at such matters. As for the other birds, they thought that the real nuisance was Jasper Jay.

Now, one of the finest singers in the whole neighborhood was Buddy Brown-Thrasher. Though he belonged to the Pleasant Valley Singing

Society, he sang so well that he usually preferred to sing by himself, instead of attending a singing party. Each morning and each evening he would seat himself in the topmost branches of a tree near the thicket where he lived; and there he would sing his favorite song over and over again.

Often other birds some distance away would cease their own music just to enjoy his, for it was very beautiful. If a wooden Indian had roamed through the woods where Buddy Brown-Thrasher was singing, he would have stopped to listen. Nobody could have helped doing that.

At least, nobody could have helped listening except Jasper Jay. In his opinion, Buddy Brown-Thrasher was the most annoying of all the feathered songsters. He often went out of his way to interrupt Buddy's evening-song. (In the morning Jasper was in too great a hurry for his breakfast to trouble himself in any such fashion.)

Well, it is not surprising that Buddy Brown-Thrasher should be upset by Jasper Jay's provoking visits. It is scarcely pleasant, when you are singing your best notes in a tree-top, to have them suddenly spoiled by a harsh, jay, jay, and to be mocked with boisterous laughter. The time came at last when Buddy Brown-Thrasher said he couldn't stand it any longer.

"Something will have to be done!" he declared. So he put on his thinking-cap at once. Being a gentlemanly sort of person, he never once thought of fighting Jasper Jay. But he felt sure that there must be some way to teach Jasper better manners. He knew, however, that there was

no use of trying to reason with the rude fellow. If he had merely talked with Jasper, and asked him if he wouldn't please do differently, Buddy Brown Thrasher would have received no more than a jeering shout in reply. Naturally, he hoped for something more satisfactory than that.

XIV
FINDING A WAY

"WHAT can you do?" the other feathered folk asked Buddy Brown-Thrasher, when he complained about Jasper Jay's rudeness in interrupting his singing. "You don't intend to fight Jasper, do you?"

"I think," replied Buddy, "I think I can find a better way than that." And that was all he would say.

As usual, Jasper came to Buddy Brown-Thrasher's thicket that evening and screamed his loudest, when Buddy began to sing. Again Buddy's evening song was spoiled. And even before the noisy Jasper had left, Buddy Brown-Thrasher began to lay his plans for putting a stop to Jasper's unpleasant trick. By the time he fell asleep Buddy knew exactly what he was going to do the next day.

The following morning Buddy Brown-Thrasher was up bright and early, even much earlier than was his habit.

And for once in his life he did not pause to sing his morning-song from his favorite perch in the tree-top. He did not even wait to have his breakfast, but flew straight to the clump of young pines where, as he knew, Jasper Jay made his home.

It was so early in the morning that a gray light half veiled the mountains; and a white mist hung over the river. The Jay family was just beginning to awaken. And soon Buddy heard Jasper's harsh voice calling to some friend who lived a little distance away.

Jasper was still somewhat sleepy. Though Buddy Brown-Thrasher could not see him, he could hear Jasper talking to his wife in a low tone, which was quite different from the noisy squawk that people at once thought of at the mere mention of Jasper Jay's name. And soon a few sweet, flute-like notes came floating out from Jasper's tree and fell upon the ears of Buddy Brown-Thrasher, where he lay snugly hidden among the boughs of a young pine.
Buddy was delighted. You see, he was a real music-lover; and seldom had he heard any sound so beautiful as those rare notes of Jasper Jay's.

"Bravo!" Buddy cried, without thinking what he was doing. And in the next instant Jasper Jay thrust a tousled

head through the pine-needles that screened his sleeping-place.

"Who's there?" he shouted in a hoarse and angry voice.

Buddy Brown-Thrasher did not answer. He kept still as a mouse. And waited for some time--hoping to hear Jasper's sweet notes again--but he waited in vain.

But Buddy had heard them once. And since it was for that very purpose that he had gone without both his breakfast and his morning-song, he was satisfied. He went home a little later, feeling well pleased, so far, with his plan for putting an end to Jasper Jay's rudeness.

The first thing that Buddy Brown-Thrasher did then was to seek his favorite perch in the very top of his own special t morning-song that was more joyous than ever. That was because he was happier than he had been for a long time--ever since Jasper Jay had been annoying him.

When he had sung his song fourteen times, Buddy ate a hearty breakfast. Feeling as sprightly as he did, he found his appetite unusually keen.

And when at last he had finished his meal he went straight off to make calls upon his friends.

Now, it was no accident that all those upon whom Buddy Brown-Thrasher called that morning belonged to the Pleasant Valley Singing Society. You see, Buddy needed help in order to teach Jasper Jay a lesson. And as soon as his friends heard his plan, they all told him that it was a good one and that they would be glad to do what they could to teach Jasper Jay better manners.

XV
THE INVITATION

THE morning was not gone before Jasper Jay had four callers. There was Bobbie Bobolink, Jolly Robin, Miss Kitty Catbird and Buddy Brown-Thrasher.

Jasper Jay was surprised to see them, because it was but his relations called on him. Of course, if one makes himself disagreeable--as Jasper generally did--people do not go out of their way to see him. But it was different with Jasper Jay's relations. Some of them were just as unmannerly and ill-bred as he was. When they came to see Jasper they were usually looking for a quarrel. And they always found what they were looking for at the house of their cousin, Jasper Jay.

Naturally, he did not like to disappoint his own cousins. He had even been known to quarrel with his great-grandfather - which is something most people refuse flatly to do.

Are you hunting for trouble?" Jasper inquired, as he raised his crest and snapped his bill together, looking as fierce as he could.

Such conduct was enough to frighten any lady. And it was no wonder that Jasper's actions, as well as his words, sent Miss Kitty Catbird into a flutter of alarm. Her companions, however, told her there was no danger.

And Jolly Robin, who was a bold fellow, hopped forward to do the talking for the callers.

"We're a committee," said he, "chosen to call on you and invite you to join the Pleasant Valley Singing Society." When he heard Jolly Robin's explanation, Jasper Jay laughed in his callers' faces.

"I'm not musical," he said. "And people who get up early in the morning to sing before breakfast always amuse me. They're silly, that's what they are!" he cried.

"Well, the Society wants you, all the same," Jolly insisted.

Jasper Shrieked at the Top of His Voice

Jasper Jay said nothing for a few moments. He was thinking. And it occurred to him, as he thought, that he could have a good deal of sport by joining the Society and spoiling its concerts. So he said at last:

"I'll become a member of your Society on one condition."

"What's that?" Jolly Robin inquired.

"You must let me sing all I want to."

Jolly Robin looked at his companions. And seeing that they all nodded their heads, he asked Jasper if he would promise to sing his best.

Jasper Jay said promptly that he would. So Jolly told him that it was a bargain. "You shall come to our next meeting and Singing Society.

"When's your next meeting?" Jasper asked.

"To-night, just before sunset!" Jolly replied. "We'll gather in the maple grove, near the sugar-house. And we'll look for you."

"I'll be there without fail," Jasper Jay assured him.

The committee left him then. And Jasper's unpleasant laughter rang in their ears for a long time afterward.

But when he stopped laughing, Jasper decided to keep very still for the rest of the day. He wanted to save his voice for the concert at sunset.

XVI
THE SINGING SOCIETY

WHEN the members of the Pleasant Valley Singing Society gathered just before sunset in the maple grove, near the sugar-house, where Cuffy Bear first saw a man, they were glad to find that Jasper Jay was already there, waiting for them.

Now, a smallish, cinnamon-colored young gentleman named Valentine Veery, who was a distant cousin of Jolly Robin's, was the singing leader. He had been chosen on account of his being able to sing both alto and soprano at the same time. And as soon as everybody had found a comfortable seat for himself, Valentine Veery said:

"I'm glad to see we have a new member with us this evening; and I hope he will enjoy himself and sing his very best."

Everybody looked at Jasper Jay. And you might think he would have felt the least bit uncomfortable. But he only laughed loudly and replied that if he didn't have a good time it wouldn't be his fault.

Then Valentine Veery bowed politely, which was more than Jasper Jay had done, and announced that "Good-night, Ladies!" would be the first song.

So all the company began to sing, including Jasper Jay. Although he knew neither the words nor the music, he shrieked at the top of his voice.

But they hadn't sung more than a few lines before the leader made them stop.

"There's something wrong somewhere," said Valentine Veery. "Has anybody a cold in his head?"

But everyone, including Jasper Jay, declared that he never was in better health in his life.

"We'll try again, then," the leader told them.

So they started once more. And once more Valentine Veery stopped them.

"This is terrible!" he said with a shudder. "Who is it, please, that is off the key?"

Nobody answered. But everybody looked at Jasper Jay again. And you would think that this time he certainly

would have felt most uncomfortable. But he only grinned as if he were enjoying himself hugely.

"We'll try the song just once more," little Mr. Veery told them. But it was no use. He stopped the singing quickly. "We can't go on like this," he declared. "The only thing to be done is to let each member sing the song alone. And in that way we shall find out who's out of tune. We'll let our oldest member sing first, and the newest one last," he directed.

So old Mr. Mockingbird, who was the first member of the Pleasant Valley Singing Society, and about the only one of his family in the neighborhood, sang the song in his best manner. And after him the others had their turn, until everybody had sung "Good-night, Ladies!" except the newest member of all.

"Now," said Valentine Veery, "now everyone must keep very still while we have the pleasure of listening to Jasper Jay."

Of course, after hearing the song repeated so many times, Jasper couldn't help learning a little of it. He began to bellow "Good-night, Ladies!" in the harshest, most ear-splitting tones he knew. Some of his listeners hurriedly tucked their heads under their wings, to shut out the horrid

sound. And as for Miss Kitty Catbird, she actually left the meeting and flew straight home, because she felt that she must scream if she stayed there any longer. Having a sensitive ear, she could not endure Jasper's rasping voice. In her opinion, it sounded more like a buzz saw than anything else.

XVII
JASPER IS ASHAMED

THE leader of the Singing Society stopped Jasper Jay's song as soon as he was able to. But Jolly Robin's cousin, Valentine Veery, found it no easy matter to silence Jasper Jay. Though he called to him several times, Jasper paid no attention to him, but continued to make all the noise he could. His notes had never sounded so loud and harsh before--but you must remember that Jasper had been saving his voice all day for this very occasion.

At last Valentine Veery launched his small, cinnamon-colored body straight at Jasper Jay and gave him a sharp nudge with his wing. And at that Jasper stopped singing.

"What's the matter?" he asked in an angry voice.

"Matter?" said Valentine Veery. "Why, you're all wrong. You're not only twisting the words of the song, but

you don't know the air at all. It's plain to see that it was you that made our concert sound so queerly." Jasper Jay jeered openly at the little leader.

"The trouble--" said Jasper--"the real trouble is that you and your friends don't know this song. I'm the only one that can sing it correctly."

Everybody exclaimed that Jasper was a ridiculous fellow.

"The committee that invited me to come here told me that I might sing a much as I wanted to. And here you've gone and stopped me!" Jasper Jay complained.

Then Buddy Brown-Thrasher cried out in a clear voice that Jasper wasn't trying his best, as he had promised the committee he would.

"In fact," said Buddy, "I'm quite sure he's trying his worst."

Jasper Jay looked quite fierce when he heard that remark.

"It's not so--and you can't prove it!" he screamed.

The little leader turned to Buddy Brown-Thrasher and said:

"What have you to say to that?"

This was what Buddy Brown-Thrasher had been waiting for.

"I'd like to state," he announced, "that Jasper Jay can sing very well, when he wants to. He has always pretended that singing was silly. And you know what a nuisance he makes of himself spoiling a good song whenever he happens to hear one. Why, I've heard him sing beautifully!"

"You never!" howled Jasper Jay.

"Yes, I have, this very morning!" Buddy Brown-Thrasher retorted. "I was in the young pine woods where he lives and I heard Jasper sing to his wife--lovely, flute-like notes they were. But I can see that he's ashamed to admit it."

Jasper Jay was so surprised that he opened and closed his bill several times without saying anything at all. It was not often that he was at a loss for words. And some of those present couldn't help smiling.

Jasper noticed their amusement.

"This is just a trick!" he squawked.

"You invited me to your Singing Society to tease me!"

As a matter of fact, his words were not far from the truth.

"Let us hear your best notes, Jasper!" somebody called. And others cried, "Yes!" and "Please!" and "We're waiting!"

But Jasper Jay would do nothing but stamp his feet and hop up and down and snap his bill together and scold. He made such a funny sight that the whole Singing Society began to laugh at him, until he flew away with one last frantic scream of rage.

Then the Pleasant Valley Singing Society had one of the most enjoyable meetings it had ever held. And though Jasper Jay showed a very sulky face to everybody for several days, it was a long time before he spoiled any songs that he happened to hear. And he never annoyed Buddy Brown-Thrasher again.

Morning and evening Buddy went to his favorite perch and sang to his heart's content.

For Jasper Jay had learned a lesson at last.

XVIII
ENEMIES

JASPER JAY was not the only bird that liked beechnuts. Reddy Woodpecker was fond of them, too. And when he saw that the beechnut crop was going to be a big one he decided that he would stay in Pleasant Valley all winter.

Jasper and Reddy were not unlike in some other respects, too. Both were noisy, quarrelsome ruffians, who did not hesitate to steal and devour the eggs and young of other birds. Furthermore, both of them were gay-colored, but in a very different way. Jasper Jay always wore a brilliant blue suit, while Reddy Woodpecker made himself easily seen by donning a bright red cap, which came down to his shoulders and gave him an odd look. Being so much alike (as far as manners were concerned), the two

quarreled whenever they met. And when Jasper Jay heard that Reddy had made up his mind to spend the winter in the North he was furious.

"It's an outrage!" he declared to Jimmy Rabbit, who had told him about Reddy Woodpecker's plan. "He needn't think he can stay in this neighborhood and eat most of the nuts--for I know him and I know what he expects to do."

Jimmy Rabbit saw at once that there was going to be some fun, for him. And he didn't want to miss any of it.

"I suppose," he said to Jasper, "I suppose you'd like to drive Reddy Woodpecker away from Pleasant Valley?"

Jasper laughed hoarsely.

"I'd not only like to, I'm going to!" he said.

"How do you intend to do it?" Jimmy asked him.

"I'll have to think a while before I decide," Jasper Jay replied.

"You'll find it pretty difficult," Jimmy Rabbit said. "Let me arrange the matter for you! I'll promise you to put Reddy Woodpecker where he can't eat any beechnuts. And so long as I do that for you, I suppose you don't care what happens."

"Certainly not!" said Jasper Jay. "Though, of course, if you could arrange things so I didn't have to see Reddy I'd like that. His red cap is hideous. It's enough to make anybody ill, just to see it."

"I think I can please you," said Jimmy Rabbit. "But you'll have to do exactly as I say, or my plan won't work." Now, Jasper Jay was really not at all eager to fight Reddy Woodpecker.

Reddy had a very sharp bill, which was even longer than Jasper's, and just as strong. And Reddy could strike a powerful blow with his bill. So Jasper Jay was glad enough to accept help from a person like Jimmy Rabbit, who was always thinking of new schemes.

"I'll leave everything to you," said Jasper.

"Good!" cried Jimmy Rabbit. "And now you must wait right where I tell you to, while I go to find Reddy Woodpecker. Follow me!" he ordered.

And Jasper Jay followed him, while Jimmy skipped briskly through the woods. He appeared to be looking for something. And at last he seemed to have found it, in a swampy hollow where water stood here and there in pools. Anyhow, he stopped beside a cedar tree and said to Jasper Jay:

"You must stand beside this tree; and you mustn't stir out of your tracks."

Jimmy Rabbit pointed out the exact spot where he wanted Jasper Jay to station himself. And since it happened that there was a puddle of water there, it was only to be expected that Jasper Jay should begin to grumble.

XIX
COLD FEET

YES! Jasper Jay looked sulky when Jimmy Rabbit told him to stand in the puddle of water, close beside the cedar tree.

"How long do you want me to stay here?" Jasper growled. "I can tell you that it's not very pleasant to stand in a pool of water a great while--on a cold day like this."

Now, all this happened quite late in the fall. And it was true that the day was a cold one. In fact, the weather seemed to be growing colder every minute.

"I won't ask you to wait any longer than is necessary," said Jimmy Rabbit. "And if you want me to put Reddy Woodpecker where he can't eat any nuts, and you don't have to see him, you must follow my directions. When you're ill and go to Aunt Polly Woodchuck, the herb doctor, you always take her advice, don't you?"

Jasper admitted that he did.

"Well, then, you must do just as I say. You know, it always makes you ill to look at Reddy Woodpecker. And I'm going to cure you, if you'll only give me a chance."

So Jasper Jay went and stood in the puddle. He screamed a good deal as he stepped into the cold water.

"This is terrible!" he groaned. "Do hurry with your scheme, or I shall have a chill."

"Remember! You're to keep absolutely still!" Jimmy Rabbit warned him.

"You mustn't move and you mustn't talk. If you should, my plan would be spoiled; and then you would have to fight Reddy Woodpecker after all."

"I pr-pr-promise!" said Jasper Jay. His bill was chattering so fast that he could hardly talk. And he was so cold that he looked uncommonly blue--even for a blue jay.

So Jimmy Rabbit hopped away, feeling quite pleased with himself and his plan. If Jasper Jay could have seen him stop, as soon as he was out of sight, and roll over and over upon the ground and hold his shaking sides he might have wondered what Jimmy was laughing at. Certainly Jasper Jay could see no joke in standing still in a cold puddle on a frosty fall day.

Well, after a time Jimmy Rabbit stopped rolling upon the ground and hurried straight to the place where the beeches grew. And there--as he had hoped to--he found Reddy Woodpecker, busily eating beechnuts.

"How are the nuts this fall?" Jimmy Rabbit asked.

"They couldn't be better!" said Reddy, stuffing his mouth as he spoke.

"They say there's a big crop this year," Jimmy Rabbit observed.

"Yes!" replied Reddy. "But it's none too big. In fact, there are too many people in this neighborhood that come here for nuts. I hope," he said, "that's not what you're looking for."

Jimmy Rabbit laughed.

"Certainly not!" he said. "I'm satisfied to leave the nuts for you and Jasper Jay to eat. I want none of them."

"Jasper Jay!" screamed Reddy Woodpecker. "Don't mention that rowdy's name to me, please! He's the greediest of all! And he's so vain, so proud of that sky-blue suit of his that I can't bear the sight of him. I wish I could put him where he couldn't eat any more of these beechnuts, and where I wouldn't have to look at him, either!"

Of course, that was not at all an agreeable remark for him to make. But it seemed to please Jimmy Rabbit greatly.

XX
GETTING RID OF JASPER

"HAVE you finished your meal?" Jimmy Rabbit asked Reddy Woodpecker, as they faced each other among the beech trees.

"Well, no--I can't say I have," replied Reddy. "When I begin to eat beechnuts I never want to stop. It's something I can't help. And I've been told that Johnnie Green is just like that when he gets a taste of peanuts. You might say that I'll have only one meal all winter long. It started as soon as the beechnuts began to ripen; and it won't be ended until the last nut is gone."

Jimmy Rabbit couldn't help smiling.

"Anyhow, you can't be really hungry," he said. "And if you'll come with me and do just as I tell you, you'll find that Jasper Jay won't trouble you for a good, long time."

"Wait a little while!" Reddy Woodpecker begged him. "I want to eat just a few more beechnuts; and then I'll come with you."

"Hurry, then!" said Jimmy Rabbit. And he watched anxiously while Reddy Woodpecker broke open more beechnuts with his strong bill and greedily ate the sweet meats.

"Come! come!" Jimmy Rabbit urged him.

"Just one more!" Reddy pleaded.

That happened several times, until at last Jimmy Rabbit said that he couldn't wait any longer, and that he was sorry, because he knew he could have helped Reddy in a way that would have pleased him.

He started off then. And at that Reddy Woodpecker hurried after him.

"I think I've eaten enough so I can manage to stay away from the beechnuts a short time," he said with a sigh.

"But I hope you won't keep me long."

"Everything depends on the weather," Jimmy Rabbit answered.

But Reddy Woodpecker did not even hear him. His mind was too busy thinking of beechnuts to pay much attention to anything else. They travelled through the

woods for some time, until they reached low, swampy place. And as soon as they came to it Jimmy Rabbit whispered to Reddy Woodpecker that he must be very still.

"Do exactly as I tell you," he ordered. "And don't even whisper to me, please! I'm going to show you where you must stand. Though the place may not be as dry as you might prefer, you'll have to follow my directions and say nothing--if you want to get rid of Jasper Jay."

"I promise--" said Reddy Woodpecker--"but I wish I had brought along a few beechnuts in my pocket. Just wait a moment!" he added. "Let me see if I haven't some nuts somewhere that I've forgotten."

So Jimmy Rabbit waited while Reddy hunted in all his pockets. He turned every one of them inside out. And since he had fifteen pockets, and he had to turn them all back again, and replace their contents, the proceeding consumed a good deal of time.

Jimmy Rabbit grew very impatient. He kept urging Reddy Woodpecker to make haste. But Reddy told him that if he hurried too much he might overlook a beechnut. So he took his own time.

But the search was all in vain. Not a single nut did he find.

Then Jimmy Rabbit led him silently to a great cedar tree and bade him stand behind it and keep perfectly still.

Reddy made a wry face when he saw that he must put his feet in a deep puddle of water. But he obeyed, all the same.

XXI
TWO RASCALS CAUGHT

THE moment Reddy Woodpecker stepped into the cold water he wanted to say "Ouch!" But Jimmy Rabbit put a finger on his mouth, meaning that Reddy must be still as a mouse.

So the red-capped scamp managed to keep quiet, though it was such hard work that he began to feel terribly hungry. Jimmy Rabbit watched him for a short time, smiling and nodding his head, as if to say:

"That's right! Just do as I say and all will be well." And then he waved a sort of farewell, before he disappeared.

Though Reddy did not know it, Jimmy Rabbit stopped as soon as he was out of sight and crept behind a bush, from which hiding-place he could watch the cedar tree, without being seen by the two beechnut lovers who stood so still beside it--for there was Jasper Jay, standing

in a puddle on one side of the big tree, and there was Reddy Woodpecker, standing in another puddle on the opposite side of the tree!

And neither of them knew that the other was anywhere around!

But there was one thing that they knew quite well: the water was almost colder than they could bear, at first. If their feet hadn't grown numb, after a time, so that there was no feeling in them at all, they wouldn't have been able to stand there so still and so long.

They both wondered where Jimmy Rabbit was, and what he was doing, and why he didn't come back.

But Jimmy Rabbit was waiting for something. As he had told Reddy Woodpecker, everything depended on the weather. Though the air was becoming sharper every minute, it was not yet cold enough to suit Jimmy Rabbit. What he wanted, was freezing weather. And at last he was satisfied. When the sun hid itself behind a bank of clouds the ground began to stiffen with frost, which covered all the puddles and pools with a coating of ice.

It was almost dark when Jimmy Rabbit left the shelter of his bush and danced up and down to get warm. Soon he came with a hop, skip and a jump to the big cedar tree.

"How are you?" he called.

And two very sulky voices answered:

"I'm cold--that's how I am!"

"Well, why don't you dance around and get warm?" Jimmy asked.

But both Reddy Woodpecker and Jasper Jay were caught fast by their feet in the frozen puddles. And as soon as they tried to move they began to squall loudly--because they were so frightened. They could no more have danced than the old cedar tree could have pulled up its roots and capered about in the forest. So far as they could see, they might as well have stepped into any of the traps that Johnnie Green set for Peter Mink.

It was no wonder that they were alarmed--no wonder that they struggled to free themselves.

"You seem to like to stay by that tree," said Jimmy Rabbit.

Now, since Jasper and Reddy had wanted exactly the same things to happen, and since they were now in the

same fix, Jimmy Rabbit could talk to them both at the same time. What he said to one fitted the other just as well. Of course, that made it very easy for Jimmy Rabbit.

But it was rather hard on Reddy Woodpecker and Jasper Jay.

"Jay! jay!" screamed Jasper in a rasping voice, like a saw biting into a log. "Ker-r-ruck! ker-r-ruck!" sounded Reddy's rolling call. And they began to scold Jimmy Rabbit, until he put his paws over his ears and ran away.

If it hadn't been for Reddy Woodpecker's strong bill they might have stayed in the cedar swamp all winter. But he set to work and soon chopped himself free. Then he helped Jasper Jay. And before it was dark they flew away together and went straight to the beechnut grove, where they ate a huge meal of beechnuts, without having a single dispute about anything.

On the contrary, they agreed perfectly in every way. Especially they agreed that Jimmy Rabbit was a busybody and that somebody ought to teach him better manners.

"I'd be glad to help you do that," said Jasper Jay.

It was actually funny that two such rowdies should talk of another's bad manners. But no doubt such an idea never entered their heads.

THE END

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